



FAMILY CONNECTS

Strategic Plan
2026 – 2029



Dear Family Connects Community.

Over the past 18 years, the Family Connects nurse visiting model has striven to provide the right care, guidance, and connection to the families of newborns as they navigate the earliest years together. We at Family Connects are grateful to have partnered with you in support of model implementation and are now proud to share the 2026-2029 Family Connects Strategic Plan.

This plan reflects a meaningful chapter in our growth and the support we provide, and it marks an important moment in our shared work. The voices, insights, and commitment of many people across the Family Connects community shaped this plan, including staff, board members, partners, and champions who believe that every family with a newborn deserves support, connection, and confidence as they grow stronger together.

From the beginning, Family Connects has been guided by a simple yet powerful idea: families are strongest when they receive the right support at the right time. As communities across the country seek ways to better support families in the weeks and months following birth, we see both urgency and opportunity before us. We know that the postpartum period is filled with possibility, but it can also be a time of stress, uncertainty, and uneven access to care. Evidence-based nurse visits for all parents and infants can make a lasting difference for babies, caregivers, families, and whole communities.

This strategic plan is rooted in that knowledge and in our confidence about the many possibilities ahead. It reflects our commitment to grow with purpose, deepen impact, strengthen partnerships, and continue building a future in which all families are welcomed with trusted guidance from the very beginning. It also reflects what makes Family Connects distinctive: an intentionally universal approach, a proven model, and a deep belief that communities hold tremendous strength and wisdom.

In this plan, you will see how we are preparing for the next stage of the Family Connects journey. Areas of focus include: advancing our model; supporting high-quality implementation; diversifying our funding; growing champions; investing in policy, relationships, and learning; setting the standard for postpartum nurse visits; and ensuring that our growth continues to be guided by impact, fidelity, innovation, and responsiveness to what families and communities need most.

We are energized by this moment. More communities are recognizing that support after birth is foundational. More partners are seeking solutions that strengthen families, extend systems of care, and make wise use of community resources. And more than ever, we are called to lead with clarity, compassion, and purpose. Family Connects is ready for that call.

Together, we can strengthen families, improve early outcomes, and create communities where all families have a strong start and the support they need to thrive. We are grateful to all those who have helped bring Family Connects to this moment and look forward to what we will accomplish together in the years ahead.

With gratitude and hope,



Jonathan Kotch, MD, MPH, MA
Chair, Board of Directors
Family Connects International



Jade Woodard, MPA
President and CEO
Family Connects International





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Family Connects would like to express gratitude for the commitment and expertise of our strategic planning committee in guiding the development of this plan, as well as to all board members, staff, and partners who contributed. We also acknowledge the support of our consulting strategy partner, Mission Spark.

Strategic Planning Committee

Board Members

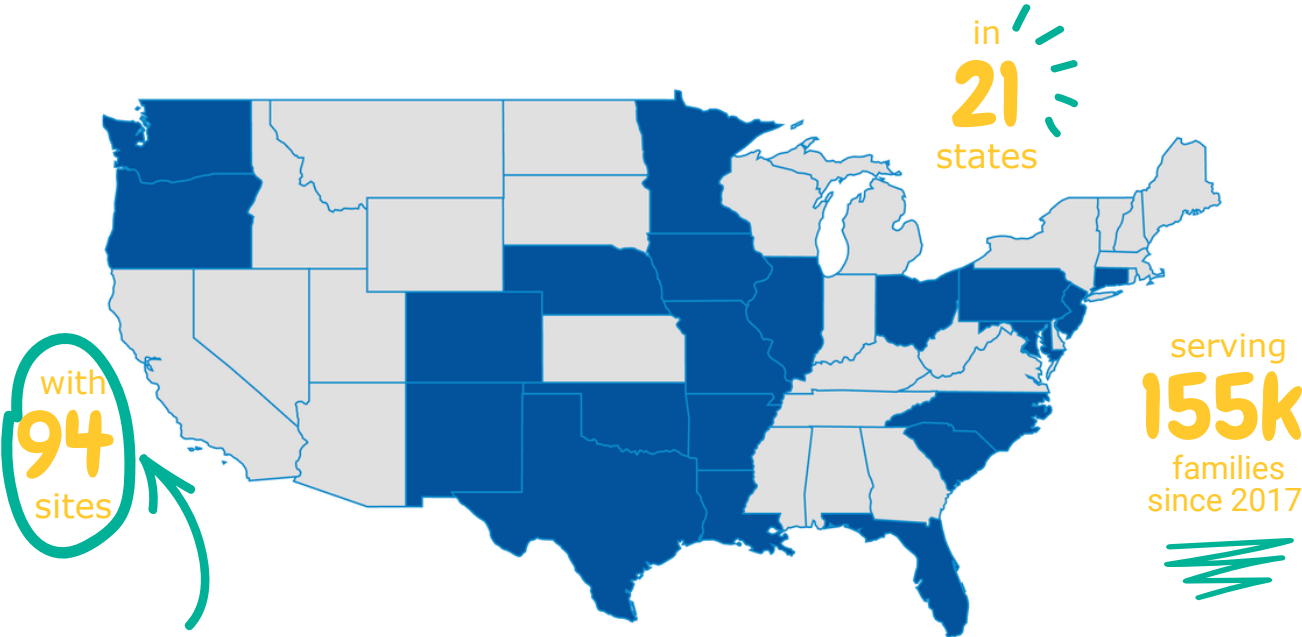
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ABOUT FAMILY CONNECTS

Family Connects is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that implements an evidence-based, universal nurse visiting model offered at no cost to families with newborns. In the weeks following birth, registered nurses provide support by assessing and nurturing physical and emotional health and wellness, as well as addressing common challenges through care, guidance, and connection to community-based resources.

More than a decade of research into the Family Connects Model has shown:

- **39% decrease** in total per-child CPS investigations for suspected maltreatment.
- **33% decrease** in total per-child emergency medical care use in early childhood.
- Mothers were **30% less likely** to report postpartum depression or anxiety.
- **Reduced disparities** across racial groups in multiple health outcomes.
- **Sustained impact** on self-reported positive parenting behaviors in the first two years.

In addition, studies on the model have underscored the importance of support in this time period, with 95% of families having identified at least one family need meriting intervention, 1% of which required an emergency response, 52% were resolved by the nurse, and 42% required connection with a community resource.

The Family Connects Model was launched in 2008 (then known as Durham Connects) by the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy in partnership with The Duke Endowment to develop, implement, and evaluate a population-wide intervention that reduces child maltreatment by helping families with newborns deal with common stressors.

In 2017, Family Connects International was launched at the Duke University Sanford School of Public Policy and became an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2022. As of the completion of the 2026-2029 Family Connects Strategic Plan, Family Connects is serving families in 21 states through 94 sites and has supported more than 155,000 families nationwide since 2017.



STRATEGIC PLAN INTRODUCTION

Family Connects is pleased to share our strategic plan for 2026-2029. This plan represents an engaged effort by the board, staff, and community partners to orient Family Connects towards its future. Within this narrative, we share our newly revised guiding principles and our strategic priorities, goals, and intended key results. We are grateful for the stakeholder insights that helped inform our next steps.

Strategic planning is a process through which an organization agrees upon and builds consensus around a set of priorities and strategies essential to fulfilling its mission. These priorities are fulfilled by actions that make measurable and meaningful progress on the mission over a defined period. Family Connects will use this document for internal and external purposes—to guide work planning, financial and human capital investments, strategic decision-making, and partner and community engagement.

The document is designed to be a presentation of the strategic planning process results, as well as a responsive plan that reflects organizational needs and evolves with changing conditions.

Strategic Planning Approach

To develop a shared foundation for strategic planning, Mission Spark conducted desk research and engaged stakeholders from November 2025 through January 2026. The purposes of the work were to inform guiding principles, gain insights on current state, identify potential opportunities and threats for the organization, and help create a shared vision for the next decade of Family Connects. Stakeholders were invited to participate in interviews, surveys, and/or the December retreat facilitated by Mission Spark and the Family Connects leadership team. All interviews and surveys were confidential.

Family Connects board and staff gathered in December 2025 for a full-day facilitated retreat. The group reflected on what makes the organization unique and impactful, and imagined what is possible for families and communities over the next decade. This gathering was the beginning of strategic conversations. Key retreat activities included:

- Reconnecting to purpose through stories of why Family Connects matters to participants and expressions of desired impact from the program.
- Exploring current strategic positioning through the identification of internal strengths to build upon, areas to shore up, and external forces shaping Family Connects' work.
- Imagining a bold future, with themes emerging around universality, partnerships, policy influence, and the power of supporting families in the postpartum period.

- Generating early pathways for the next 3–5 years, considering organizational capacity, research and innovation, policy influence, philanthropy and other revenue sources, statewide expansions, and opportunities for national leadership.
- Identifying preliminary steps that support future success across governance, funding, data, operations, and communications.

Following these activities, the strategic planning committee, composed of Family Connects board members and executive team, met three times to workshop the elements of the draft plan and refine the guiding principles; the executive team met bi-weekly over five months to review and refine. Family Connects staff also engaged in two additional sessions to provide feedback and further support the development of the strategic plan.



HOW THE FAMILY CONNECTS NURSE VISIT WORKS



2026 - 2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Family Connects guiding principles serve as a north star, leading the organization into the future with purpose, vision, and alignment.

VISION

Every family is nurtured as they welcome a newborn.

PURPOSE

To ensure every family with a newborn is supported, connected, and confident as they navigate early childhood and grow together.

MISSION

We transform care for all families with newborns by partnering to offer nurse visits so every family has access to healthcare, guidance, and connection.

ORGANIZATIONAL PILLARS

Committed to Every Family: We work to ensure each and every family receives personalized and trusted care based on their unique needs. We partner with communities to reduce barriers, create access, and strengthen systems to serve all families.

Guided by Science: We use research and data to drive decisions, maintain fidelity to what works, and continuously improve. We adapt responsibly as contexts and communities evolve.

Driven by Transformation: We believe early connection changes everything. Our collective work strengthens families, shifts systems, and catalyzes lasting change in family support, maternal health, and child outcomes.

Centered in Relationships: We center families, elevate nurses, honor teammates, and partner with communities through listening, respect, and shared learning. We build trust across differences and act with humility.

Grounded in Integrity: We lead with accountability, trust, and transparency. We honor commitments, steward resources responsibly, and hold ourselves to high standards in service of families, partners, and colleagues.

FAMILY CONNECTS STRATEGIC ORIENTATION

Over the next three years, we will pursue accelerated network growth and further our national leadership - supported by a foundational commitment to quality and outcomes - to serve more community partners and nursing teams who care for families with newborns.

We seek to grow in ways that support scale, are sustainable, and are grounded in collaboration across the sector and with communities. Through this approach, we will build better systems for maternal and child health, and early childhood, to transform the lives of families through meaningful support and connections in the weeks following birth.

By 2030, Family Connects will have strengthened our organizational capacity, solidified our funding model, enhanced our national leadership for maternal and child health and early childhood systems development, and achieved substantial reach in universally offering nurse visiting to families with newborns. By addressing physical health, emotional well-being, and social determinants of health, Family Connects' partnerships will uplift families and strengthen communities.

Long-Term Visions of Success

- Normalize nurse visiting as the standard of healthcare and the societal expectation for every caregiver after birth.
- Establish Family Connects as essential family support at the intersection of public health, healthcare, and early childhood systems.
- Be a leader in the field of maternal health and early childhood—a convener, a collaborator, an expert, and a resource for data and best practice.
- Increase growth in numbers of states served, as well as breadth of reach in current states served.
- Institutionalize the Family Connects model as the standard of practice with braided and blended funding from state, federal, philanthropic and private sources, as well as coverage mandates.
- Improve maternal and infant health outcomes, decrease parental isolation, reduce child maltreatment, increase attachment, and increase academic success of young children.

Our approach will be anchored in five strategic priorities to move Family Connects forward and achieve reach, growth, leadership, and innovation. Each is accompanied by goals and objectives that create a pathway for success.

- **#1: Build Organizational Capacity for Scale, Quality, and Trust**
- **#2: Drive Diversified Funding and Champions to Support Growth and Sustainability**
- **#3: Enable Scalable Growth Through Partnerships, Policy, and Systems Integration**
- **#4: Advance Research, Learning, and Innovation as Strategic Assets**
- **#5: Seed and Promote a National Standard for Postpartum Nurse Visiting**

Family Connects will pursue these priorities at a time of both great possibility and real complexity. As an intermediary, Family Connects works alongside states and communities across diverse political and fiscal environments. Implementation and long-term sustainability of the Family Connects Model is shaped by local context and partnership. While today's federal, state, and local dynamics require adaptability and care, they also reinforce the need for Family Connects' trusted, informed approach to growth and partnership.



2026 - 2029 PRIORITIES AND GOALS

Strategic Priority 1 Build Organizational Capacity for Scale, Quality, and Trust



Family Connects is growing in reach. That growth is happening because the Model works and partners value it. At the same time, staff and stakeholders have been clear that internal capacity, systems, and role clarity must keep pace with the demands of a growth-oriented organization. This priority reflects a shared desire to protect what makes Family Connects strong, while building the structure, staffing, products, functions, and workflows needed to scale sustainably.

Goal 1: Align staffing, roles, and operating model to support growth needs.

Goal 2: Strengthen internal processes, systems, and cross-functional execution.

Goal 3: Implement a standardized, price/cost-sensitive community partnership pathway that strengthens fidelity and drives quality.

Goal 4: Build communications function to reinforce trust, create awareness, and strengthen reputation.

Goal 5: Invest in staff sustainability, retention, and organizational culture.

Strategic Priority 2 Drive Diversified Funding and Champions to Support Growth and Sustainability



Family Connects has momentum and opportunity, but the current funding model leaves the organization more concentrated than is desired as it pursues national expansion and strengthened infrastructure. Stakeholders emphasized the need for a more robust financial plan, stronger advancement capacity, and a broader base of champions who can open doors and strengthen visibility. This priority is about building a more resilient funding mix and the relationships to support it, so Family Connects can lead and grow with a balanced revenue mix.

Goal 1: Create a diversified organizational funding strategy with clear targets and pathways.

Goal 2: Strengthen advancement infrastructure and launch a development and stewardship approach.

Goal 3: Strengthen leadership engagement for resource development.

Goal 4: Build a broad champion network to support national positioning.

2026 - 2029 PRIORITIES AND GOALS

Strategic Priority 3

Enable Scalable Growth through Partnerships, Policy, and Systems Integration



Family Connects is committed to serving more families with newborns and to deepening implementation in states where the model already has traction, while also expanding thoughtfully into new communities and states. At the same time, stakeholders surfaced that statewide growth requires more than starting sites; it requires clear partnership pathways, policy and financing support, and the ability to integrate into state payor systems in ways that are consistent, credible, and sustainable. This priority reflects that scale can be enabled by strong partnerships and a deeper policy and funding strategy at both the state and federal levels.

Goal 1: Define expansion strategy and sequencing (where, how fast, and why).

Goal 2: Build policy/advocacy/lobbying capacity and define activating state/site offerings.

Goal 3: Strengthen technical assistance on financing and insurance to states and sites.

Goal 4: Advance federal policy and funding pathways that accelerate state growth.

Goal 5: Honor founding legacy in the Carolinas through partnership stabilization and growth.

Strategic Priority 4

Advance Research, Learning, and Innovation as Strategic Assets



Family Connects' evidence base, network data, and learning potential are significant strengths. At the same time, stakeholders noted constraints in data quality, extraction, reporting, and automation, along with the need for clearer coordination of learning across sites and the opportunity for more intentional research, dissemination, and convening agendas. This priority is about turning research, learning, and innovation into a strategic engine, supported by dedicated, executive-level leadership. As a result, Family Connects can strengthen fidelity, build community, demonstrate impact, and further its contributions to the field.

Goal 1: Establish integrated research, learning, and innovation leadership through a dedicated executive leadership role.

Goal 2: Improve data extraction and reporting for internal and external audiences.

Goal 3: Build a learning culture across Family Connects and sites that supports fidelity and improvement.

Goal 4: Build a research and innovation agenda.

Strategic Priority 5

Seed and Promote a National
Standard for Postpartum Nurse
Visiting



Across the retreat discussions and stakeholder interviews, there was a consistent push to help shift postpartum nurse visiting from something families may be “lucky to receive” to something that is expected care. Family Connects is well-positioned to lead this change because of the strength of its universal model, the credibility of its outcomes, and its growing network of partners. This priority reflects a timely opportunity, given increased attention on maternal health and disparate maternal health outcomes, to define what high-quality postpartum nurse visiting looks like and pursue national pathways to create a new standard of care for all families with newborns.

Goal 1: Cultivate expert leadership capacity and define a standard for postpartum nurse visiting.

Goal 2: Identify and pursue national measures and preventive service topic pathways.

Goal 3: Build the coalition and credibility, or join the tables/coalitions, required for standard-setting.

Goal 4: Align measure/standard development with expansion and reimbursement strategy for the Family Connects model



2026 - 2029 STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Family Connects is entering an exciting period of growth, opportunity, and network collaboration. While there are many dynamics in the current landscape that are unpredictable, focused attention, a commitment to enacting these core strategies, and learning from feedback along the way will support Family Connects' success and achievement of the mission to transform care for families with newborns by partnering to offer nurse visits so every family has access to healthcare, guidance, and connections.

Family Connects will also create an annual operations plan, with key objectives, to activate the strategic plan's implementation. This will ensure priorities and goals are broken down into activities that are specific, measurable, actionable, reasonable, and time-bound. These objectives will have executive sponsors and staff teams assigned to ensure accountability.

The Family Connects Board of Directors and staff are committed to a thorough and regular process for review of the progress on this strategic plan, including six-month data-driven review of plan progress, adjustments made to emerging conditions on an annual basis, and feedback loops with the partner sites Family Connects serves.

SUMMARY

This plan has laid out the priorities of Family Connects for the next three years, beginning with our guiding principles, our commitment to creating a more fair, just, connected, and caring postpartum health and community system, and our aspiration to lead in a dynamic national maternal health and early childhood environment. This is a living roadmap that we will continue to revisit over the months and years ahead.

We look forward to involving those we serve, partnering within this process, to accomplish our vision, mission, and goals together. Ensuring that every family with a newborn is supported, connected, and confident as they navigate early childhood takes alignment, coordination, and community.



“Sometimes you don't know where to get support or how to take that first step. Family Connects knew that we were a new family and took the first step to guide us.”

Esmeralda
Esmeralda R., mother of two



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